

Exercise leadership

If you are in a leadership role, you have a crucial influence on whether or not bullying is an issue in your part of the organisation. The way you behave and communicate with colleagues becomes the model for 'the way we do things around here'. (You may like to re-read *How to be an effective leader*, which was distributed to all staff in spring 2005 and is available at www.bristol.ac.uk/pwe/pos_coms_2_leadership.pdf.) In particular, if you are aware of problems between staff, try to deal with them before they become entrenched. Establish standards of interpersonal behaviour. Some bullying arises because those in charge fail to address performance or disciplinary issues, thus encouraging others to take matters into their own hands. Sometimes bullying among junior staff is a reflection of behaviour at more senior levels.

Seek support

Anyone who experiences bullying ought to be able to go direct to his or her **line manager** for support and help in addressing the problem. This assumes, of course, that the management-staff relationship is healthy.

The University's **Dignity at Work and Study Advisers** are trained to listen to victims of bullying and help them decide a way forward. They can also listen to those who find themselves accused of bullying. The service is confidential. See www.bristol.ac.uk/staffcounselling/dignity-at-work for more information.

The University can offer a lively, half-day workshop called **Harassment - And How To Tackle It!** The workshop uses professional actors to bring new perspectives to Dignity at Work, bullying and working relationships. Contact Pete Bailie in the Department of Drama (tel. Bristol 954 5231; email pete.bailie@bristol.ac.uk).

The **Staff Counselling Service** (tel. Bristol 954 5704; email staff-counselling@bristol.ac.uk) is linked to the advisers' group described above and can help people deal with the personal impact of bullying, poor workplace relationships and so forth. Anger management counselling is also available for those who are concerned about

their own behaviour patterns. In addition, the service can arrange coaching for those who want to improve their interpersonal skills.

Staff Development (www.bristol.ac.uk/personnel/sdev/about/) offers assertiveness training. This is invaluable in helping you to reflect on your personal communication style and to explore the differences between passive, aggressive and passive-aggressive responses. A full coaching and training programme is available to heads of department and a further extensive leadership programme is planned.

The University's **Mediation Service** is a confidential service provided by trained members of staff. It supports people in reaching agreement and compromise when workplace relationships have become difficult. For more information, see www.bristol.ac.uk/Depts/Secretary/staffmediation.htm or telephone Bristol 331 7311.

Personnel Services offers advice on University policies and procedures and on employment law, and can help deal with conflicts. The prime objective is to support staff in resolving disagreements, but disciplinary action is sometimes necessary to restore

acceptable standards of behaviour. See the Personnel Services and Staff Development website (www.bristol.ac.uk/personnel/) for details, or talk to your personnel manager.

Union representatives will support their members in deciding what action to take in cases of bullying and provide advocacy and representation.

What have we forgotten that's important?

As with the previous three leaflets in this series (*Making internal email a blessing rather than a curse*, *How to be an effective leader* and *Managing time more effectively*), your comments would be welcome. Please email pwe-feedback@bristol.ac.uk. For more information on PWE at Bristol, take a look at www.bristol.ac.uk/pwe.

Storing your copies

The Positive Communications leaflets are proving popular. As a result, we hope to continue to issue them to current and new staff throughout 2005/6. A folder to store them in is available (into which back issues will be placed for new staff). If you would like a folder, please email pwe-feedback@bristol.ac.uk and one will be sent to you.

Positive Communications

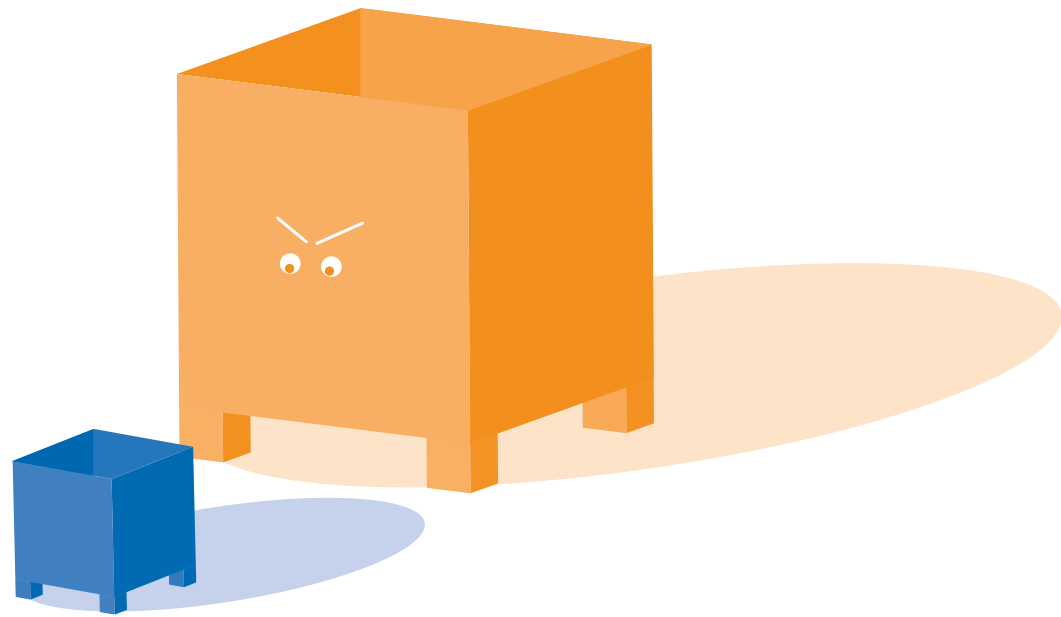
An initiative is under way to create a more positive working environment. A group of academics and support staff is leading the implementation of an improvement plan drawn up after a major staff survey.

One step the group is taking is to produce a series of advice sheets – called Positive Communications – on issues raised by staff. The advice will always be brief and practical.

If you need all or part of this publication in an alternative format, eg in Braille, in larger print or on tape, please call 928 7776.

Issue Four:

Dealing with bullying



Dealing with bullying

According to the staff survey conducted in 2003, most of us think the University is a good place to work. At the same time, too many of us have witnessed or experienced bullying – something that is known to occur in all kinds of organisations but is nonetheless unacceptable.

Bullying is a type of harassment. It can cause physical harm, emotional distress and damage to the working environment. Sometimes it takes the form of straightforward intimidation. It can also entail:

- **threats to professional status**, such as belittling remarks or public humiliation
- **threats to personal standing**, such as name calling or derogatory references to age, gender, race, religion or sexual orientation
- **deliberate isolation** of an individual from his or her colleagues or from information and opportunities
- **imposed overwork**, characterised by undue pressure and impossible deadlines
- **undermining** someone by consistently failing to acknowledge their good work, unreasonably stripping them of responsibility or setting them up to fail.

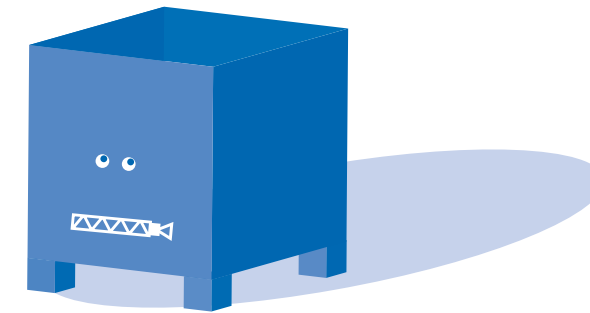
We tend to think of bullying as something that people in positions of authority do to those ‘below’ them, but peer-to-peer bullying occurs too. Furthermore, it is not unknown for managers to be bullied by their staff or for staff to be bullied by students.

Everyone has the right to be treated with respect at work. The University has a strong commitment to eliminating bullying. If we all follow the suggestions in this leaflet, bullying should end up where it belongs – in history.

Spot the warning signs in ourselves

Most of us are probably capable of bullying, but we manage to control the way we actually behave. One reason why some people fail to exercise such control is that they simply don’t realise how much harm bullying does. Work pressures can make us insensitive to others’ feelings. Here are some questions each of us might usefully ask ourselves:

- Do I criticise people publicly instead of dealing with them on a one-to-one basis?
- Am I careful not to exclude certain people from meetings and information loops?
- What techniques do I use to influence others?
- How do I wield any authority I have over colleagues?
- Do I need training to make me a better manager of people?



Tackle bullying early

Research shows that if someone’s bullying is tackled after the first or second incident, it is less likely to become an established pattern of behaviour. Notice the way you are treated. Initially, we tend to make excuses for other people: perhaps they were having a bad day and didn’t really mean to cause offence? Bullying can be subtle and it may only be on reflection that you feel uneasy or manipulated. Don’t let a bullying incident pass if it leaves you or colleagues feeling disturbed.

If you believe you are being bullied, say so

A statement as simple as ‘I’m feeling bullied’ can stop a bully in his or her tracks. But there may be a power imbalance between you and the bully that makes such directness feel too risky. In such a case, talk the situation over in confidence with someone you trust. This may help you to identify a better way of tackling the situation. Crucially, it will also give you some personal support. People sometimes think they must have inadvertently caused a bully to pick on them. Their confidence can be seriously undermined if they bottle up such feelings instead of talking about them.

Don’t be a silent witness

If you witness a clear act of bullying, try not to ignore it. You might be able to help prevent further incidents – and to avoid becoming the next victim. Consider whether it would be appropriate for you to discuss what you have seen with the individual responsible and the person who has been bullied. Your interpretation of events may be challenged, but at least the aggressor will know that their behaviour has been noticed. If you don’t feel you can raise the matter in this way, you can always turn to others for help (see ‘Seek support’).

Manage your anger

Bullying often makes the victim and any witnesses profoundly angry. If you experience or see bullying, think carefully about how to express your feelings. It is good to be assertive, but aggression is to be avoided. The bully is more likely to listen and take notice if he or she is challenged clearly but calmly than if they are merely attacked. If you can deal with a situation quickly, it prevents anger (yours, the bully’s or the victim’s) from building up and becoming more difficult to resolve.